

Robert Wood Johnson Board of Trustees
Camden Charter School
Welcoming Remarks
October 28, 2010

Governor Christie:

Thank you all for inviting me to be here this morning.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation stands at the cutting edge of innovation, imagination and advancement of health care policy in America.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's evidence-based research, funding initiatives and health policy perspectives are truly a national treasure right here in New Jersey.

Under the leadership of CEO Risa Lavizzo-Mourey – and the Board of Trustees, the Robert Wood Foundation is improving the health of millions of people across our nation by leading the effort to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic, working to increase access to high quality health care, helping to build capacity in our nursing schools and improving the care of the chronically ill.

There is an old proverb that says, “He who has health, has hope. And he who has hope has everything.”

The Department of Health and Senior Services also seeks to improve health and give hope to New Jersey residents, especially those most in need.

When I first met Governor Christie, he pledged to me, that despite the state's dire fiscal situation, he would do everything in his power to help those most in need.

The Governor has lived up to that promise. In an unprecedented year of shrinking tax revenue and budget cuts, the State was able to retain and enhance the benefits of our prescription program for low-income seniors by reducing co-pays for life saving prescriptions.

The Department also invested over \$100 million in this year's budget to ensure that community-based programs for seniors would remain intact, and then we added an additional \$14 million to ensure that our seniors will be able to live with dignity and independence in the community-based settings that they prefer.

The State also maintained funding for our community health centers to ensure that the uninsured and underinsured, mainly in New Jersey's minority communities, would continue to have access to high quality health care.

The Governor also increased charity care funding so our urban hospitals can continue to serve as the state's health care safety net for New Jersey's uninsured residents.

The Department also established a new HIV/AIDS drug benefit program, launched a Pediatric Medical Day Care Program and awarded \$11.4 million in grants for Health Information Exchanges in New Jersey.

And considering we are all here today in Camden, I am pleased to announce that Camden is one of four cities in New Jersey that received funding to set up a working Health Information Exchange. In fact, the hospitals in Camden – Cooper University Hospital, Lourdes Health System, and Virtua Health – recently began sharing data on patients with chronic conditions. Their effort is expected to avoid duplicative testing and improve coordination of care.

And the time for creating these exchanges has clearly arrived.

The U.S. lags far behind other countries in digitizing medical records. National studies suggest that fewer than 30 percent of private-practice physicians have Electronic Health Records and New Jersey's rate is probably not much higher than 20 percent.

By creating and advancing health information exchanges in New Jersey, patient care will improve and health care costs will decline. Governor Christie has appointed a Statewide Health Information Technology coordinator so we will continue to make progress in this area.

And while physicians and patients benefit from increased use of technology, the Department is focused on an equally important issue, the physician shortage confronting our state.

As many of you are probably aware, the New Jersey Council of Teaching Hospitals predicts that by the year 2020 New Jersey will face a doctor shortage of approximately 2,800 physicians. The Association of American Medical Colleges, Center for Workforce Studies recently released new physician shortage estimates that, beginning in 2015, are 50 percent worse than originally anticipated. By 2015, the shortage of doctors across all specialties will quadruple.

And, a preview of what may lie ahead is being played out just a few hundred miles to our north in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where the State's Universal Health Care law is increasing access to care, but also contributing to higher waiting times for patients and exacerbating the State's physician shortage.

In fact, the State's Medical Society just released a survey that showed half of primary care practices are closed to new patients, and that for non-urgent medical conditions patients have to wait 29 days to meet a family medicine doctor and 53 days to see an internist.

The Medical Society's President, Doctor Alice Coombs went so far as to say, "A strong physician workforce is critical to delivering top quality and cost effective care. If physicians think that the viability of their practices is threatened or unsustainable under a new payment system, Massachusetts may encounter further problems with recruitment and retention. And that, certainly, will affect patient care."

These issues are all coming to New Jersey, sooner rather than later.

That is why, under the leadership of Governor Christie, I am bringing together experts from both the public and private sector to examine this issue and develop both short and long term solutions to address this problem. This group, The Council of Physician Access and Development, or CPAD, will examine and make recommendations on everything from Graduate Medical Education to Medical Malpractice Reform.

How successful New Jersey is in retaining physicians will be critical to how health reform affects our state.

Governor Christie has formed an inter-departmental working group to ensure that statewide implementation of health reform is efficient and effective. And considering that the law will affect every single resident living in New Jersey, I thank the Governor for doing everything possible to prepare for changes.

Governor Christie and I pledge to do all that we can to ensure New Jersey's health care improves as health care reform changes take effect.

Looking ahead to 2011, I can tell all of you here today that challenges and opportunities abound. New Jersey faces another difficult budget year and tough choices lie ahead for the Governor and every state department.

However, I pledge to all of you here today, that I, like all of you, will work tirelessly to improve New Jersey's health care system, protect those who can't protect themselves and ensure that future generations of New Jerseyans have the same access to high quality health care that we enjoy today.

Thank you.